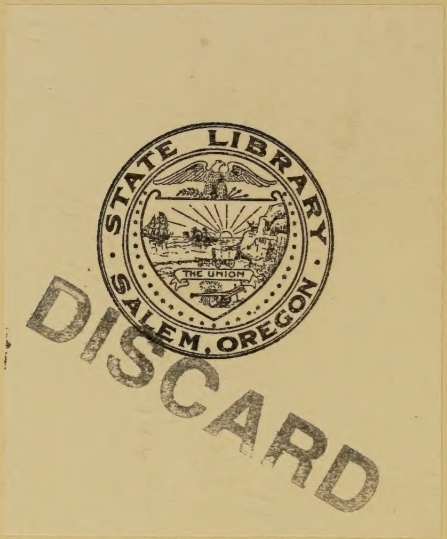
A WORLD OF WINDOWS

by

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE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A WORLD OF WINDOWS

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

A WORLD OF WINDOWS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

AUTHOR OF "MANHATTAN," "YOUTH," "BEYOND THE STARS," "THE QUIET SINGER," "TODAY AND TOMORROW," ETC.

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Windows through which the poet sees the poetry of everyday things, of pallid shop girls, messenger boys, hurrying laborers, warriors and the more pleasant portraits of love and youth. They are little character sketches of life in the city especially. Reprints from American magazines.

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TO MY FRIEND

OWEN JOHNSON

For the privilege of reprinting the poems included in this volume, the author thanks the editors of the following magazines: *Harper's*, *The Century*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The American*, *The Outlook*, *The Cosmopolitan*, *Everybody's*, *The Pictorial Review*, *The Delineator*, *The Designer*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Munsey's*, *Ainslee's*, *Life*, *The Forum*, *The Chronicle*, *The Touchstone*, *The Smart Set*, and the New York *Tribune*.

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A WORLD OF WINDOWS

A WORLD OF WINDOWS

A WORLD OF WINDOWS

Behind my house are windows,
  Each lit with yellow flame,
And each one is a little world
  Set in a little frame.

A shop-girl, through her mirror,
  Looks at her ashen face.
Below her, in a peignoir
  Of shabby, dirty lace,

A woman, stout and lazy,
  Sits playing solitaire;
Dishevelled is her ill-lit room,
  And tumbled is her hair.

There is one little window
  Set high above the rest;
I see the edge of an iron bed,
  And a young girl thinly dressed.

Her face is full of sorrow—
One seldom sees her laugh;
Each night she bends above an old
And faded photograph.

She takes it from the bureau
In that small, stuffy place;
One evening, I could almost see
The tears upon her face,

When the wild gas-jet flickered
Above her heavy hair.
That whole long night I saw her,
An image of despair,

Beside her tiny window
Gazing at the white moon.
I wondered what her life must be—
Had Love gone by so soon?

A week dragged on; her shutters
Were drawn, as if to hide
The little drama of her world;
And then—one night—she died.

She killed herself. I read the truth,
Hidden among the news—
A little item, stale enough:
How many love—and lose!

Three days—and then another girl
  Took up her story there.
Two flights below, a woman still
  Sat playing solitaire,

In the same shabby peignoir
  Of yellow, dirty lace,
And the poor shop-girl, in her glass,
  Looked at her pallid face.

Behind my house are windows,
  Each lit with yellow flame;
Each is a world for some one
  Who plays the old, old game.

And when one world is emptied,
  Through terror or disgrace,
How soon another brave one comes
  To fill the vacant place!

THE TIME-CLOCK

I

"Tick-tock! Tick-tock!"
Sings the great time-clock.
And the pale men hurry,
And flurry and scurry
To punch their time
Ere the hour shall chime.
"Tick-tock! Tick-tock!"
Sings the stern time-clock.

"It—is—time—you—were—come!"
Says the pendulum.
"Tick-tock! Tick-tock!"
Moans the big time-clock.
They must leave the heaven
Of their beds. . . . It is seven,
And the sharp whistles blow
In the city below.
They can never delay—
If they're late, they must pay.
"God help them!" I say.
But the great time-clock
Only says, "Tick-tock!"

They are chained, they are slaves
From their birth to their graves!
And the clock
Seems to mock
With its awful "tick-tock!"
There it stands at the door
Like a brute, as they pour
Through the dark narrow way
Where they toil night and day.
They are goaded along
By the terrible song
Of whistle and gong,
And the endless "Tick-tock!"
Of the great time-clock.

"Tick-tock! Tick-tock!"
Runs the voice of the clock.

II

Some day it will cease!
They will all be at peace,
And dream a new dream
Far from shuttle and steam.
And whistles may blow,
And whistles may scream—
They will smile—even so,
And dream their new dream.

But the clock will tick on
When their bodies are gone;
And others will hurry,
And scurry and worry,
While "Tick-tock! Tick-tock!"
Whispers the clock.

"Tick-tock! Tick-tock!
Tick-tock! Tick-tock!"
Forever runs on the song of the clock!

THE DARKNESS

The darkness has been very kind to me;
  She has shut out the white flame of the world,
  Hidden the sun of sorrow when it hurled
Its beam on me, and I was lost in light!
She brought the velvet healing of the night
  When I was frantic with the staring day,
  Till round about me her great spirit lay,
  A waveless ocean, drowning my dismay.

The darkness has been very kind to me;
  Like a still prayer thought by a lonely nun
  Her quiet is; the day's griefs, one by one,
Drift to the shore of long-forgotten things,
And hushed are the loud earth's old echoings.
  Deep in her bosom, deep, oh, very deep,
  I hide my head when her first shadows creep,
  And sink at last within the pool of Sleep.

FOR THE FUNERAL OF AN AVIATOR

Let not the earth confine him
  Who loved the air and sky;
To no thin grave consign him,
  Now he has come to die;
But let his tomb forever be
High as the heavens, broad as the sea.

From this exultant, splendid,
  Great hill, now hurl his dust,
Until his ashes, blended
  With the four winds august,
Become a part of them at last,
And sail forever on the blast!

A PRAYER FOR THE GIFT OF SONG

If I could leave one song behind
To tell of all the joy I knew,
To show the world that Life is kind,
Because it held the moon—and You;

Then gladly would I go from these
Enchanted days to Death's dark night.
Dear God, who filled my years with peace,
Help me to sing, and sing aright.

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A VOICE AT MORNING

Beyond the great frontiers of dawn
I heard the singing of a bird.
O fluted eloquence! O word
That from the harps of heaven was drawn!—

What rapture to the gates of light
You brought when the last stars grew pale.
Were you a lonely nightingale,
Blown down the windy wastes of white?

Or were you some ecstatic dream
A child had dreamed and cast aside?
You floated on the ether's tide,
As bubbles float upon a stream.

You reached my heart at last. You bore
A message from the distant spheres;
You were a silver sound, like tears
Shed by the saints, or sad Lenore.

You were the gospel of the day,
The frozen wonder of the dawn.
O lovely bird, sing on, sing on! . . .
Alas! all beauty fades away.

LIGHT LOVE

The love that is not quite love—
  Ah! let us be kind to it!
For it bears a touch of the dream above,
  The passion exquisite.

The love that is not quite love,
  But only a fleeting thing,
Like the wraith of rain in an Autumn lane,
  Or the thought of an unborn Spring.

The love that is not quite love,
  The careless, happy glance;
But deep in its heart it holds a part
  Of glamour and high romance.

A flash from the fire divine,
  A glimpse of the page unwrit;
The youthful love that is not quite love—
  Ah! let us be kind to it!

THE LITTLE HOME PAPER

THE little home paper comes to me,
As badly printed as it can be;
It's ungrammatical, cheap, absurd—
Yet how I love each intimate word!
For here am I in the teeming town,
Where the sad, mad people rush up and down,
And it's good to get back to the old lost place,
And gossip and smile for a little space.

The weather is hot; the corn crop's good;
They've had a picnic in Sheldon's Wood.
And Aunt Maria was sick last week;
Ike Morrison's got a swollen cheek,
And the Squire was hurt in a runaway—
More shocked than bruised, I'm glad they say.
Bert Wills—I used to play ball with him—
Is working a farm with his Uncle Jim.

The Red Cross ladies gave a tea,
And raised quite a bit. Old Sol MacPhee
Has sold his house on Lincoln Road—
He couldn't carry so big a load.
The Methodist minister's had a call
From a wealthy parish near St. Paul.
And old Herb Sweet is married at last—
He was forty-two. How the years rush past!

But here's an item that makes me see
What a puzzling riddle life can be.
"Ed Stokes," it reads, "was killed in France
When the Allies made their last advance."
Ed Stokes! That boy with the laughing eyes
As blue as the early-Summer skies!
He wouldn't have killed a fly—and yet,
Without a murmur, without a regret

He left the peace of our little place,
And went away with a light in his face;
For out in the world was a job to do,
And he wouldn't come home till he'd seen it
through! . . .
Four thousand miles from our tiny town
And its hardware store, this boy went down.
Such a quiet lad, such a simple chap—
But he's put East Dunkirk on the map!

THE LOITERER

I HUNGER for the Spring,
For April's green delight;
O long, long loitering
Of Winter's piercing night!

Hark! in the trees one bird,
And in the grass one star!
One lovely, silver word,
Though tremulous and far.

But in that flower the soul
Of hidden April wakes;
And in that sound the whole
Mad heart of Music breaks.

LOVE'S SURETY

How dare we whisper, Love, we will be true
  Till the last stars and the last tides are gone?
Do not the high gods, hearing me and you,
  Smile, and pass on?

Lovers have told their love—and broken great
      vows;
  Lovers have promised—and the years have
      found
Two faithless ones, grief written on their brows,
  In separate ground.

Yet we dare whisper the old promises,
  Look in each others' eyes, and Love's wine
      quaff;
In some far place, bordered with laurel trees,
  Do the gods laugh?

THE SHELL

The city is a monstrous shell
Forever at my ear;
Deep voluntary, clanging bell
And thundering grief I hear.

Can all the sounds within it be
Far echoes of the past?
Then from what unremembered sea
Was this great shell upcast?

Is some old sorrow singing yet,
Some pain of Greece or Rome?
Some theme that Time may not forget,
As shells still sing of home?

O lonely City! Who can tell
What anguish you have known,
When on this coast, a shattered shell,
Your tragic tale is blown?

And we who whisper in your heart,
And weep our scalding tears,
May be but echoes from the start
Of the world's sounding years!

IN AN ITALIAN GARDEN

HARK! through the velvet dark I heard
  Cascades of sound, like living light:
One tremulous, ecstatic bird—
  The Galli-Curci of the night!

THE HOSTS OF APRIL

Behold young April's banners
  Upon the boughs of Spring!
In every glade and marshland
  Green flags are shimmering.
The great blue armies of the Lord
  Thunder, and stir, and sing!

In yellow, bright battalions
  The hosts of April come;
There is a sounding chorus,
  The faint tap of a drum,
And in the woods' deep bivouac
  A strange delirium.

Now every shy earth creature
  Advances in the dawn,
For the black ranks of Winter
  Have suddenly withdrawn;
A glory marches through the world
  And camps upon my lawn.

I hear the pipers playing
  Upon their golden flutes;
Hark to the martial music
  Of all the forest lutes!

A myriad cymbals crash and beat,
And the glad world salutes.

Behind the flowery victors,
Close in their royal train,
I see another army
Sweep over hill and plain—
It is a purple regiment
With slanting swords of rain.

O passionate invasion,
Desired, long-dreamed-of time!
Rush through our hearts with rapture,
Erase Life's dust and grime;
For now the heavens have bent to earth
In the year's silver prime.

There never moved an army
With such a lordly swing;
The waiting earth is jubilant
At such sweet conquering.
Victoriously come once more
The valiant hosts of Spring!

TO ONE IN HEAVEN

After you died, a few stray letters came,
Bearing your name.
A friend across the sea
Wrote with the old light laughter; tenderly
She wished that you were with her, never knowing
That now for you the winds of heaven were blowing;
That you were faring to a distant bourne,
Whence your white feet would nevermore return.

And then there came,
Like little bundles of flame,
Bright-coloured ribbons—red, and yellow, and blue,
Samples from some gay shop, dainty as you.
A bit of lace, a bit of gossamer,
A rainbow sheaf, like dreams that never were.
And when I saw them, through my blinding tears,
I thought of your bright years,
Your love of all this filmy green and gold—
And your brief story told.

I hope the angels give you your desire,
O little heart of fire—

Give you the fairy garments that you crave
Even beyond the grave!
You would not be quite happy in your new place
Without your golden lace,
Without those little, trivial, tender things
The looms wove out of dim imaginings.
For you loved feathery textures, airy spinnings,
Like cobwebs from the world's remote beginnings;
Soft stuffs as fleecy as the clouds above,
That grew more lovely for your lovely love.

Who knows but now your wings may be of fleece,
Your robe of some fine fabric made of these:
Rainbows and star-dust and a lost moonbeam,
And a white thought from Lady Mary's dream
Of that first moment when she knew that One
Would live through her. . . . Is this your garment, spun
From rapture at the living loom of heaven?
O little angel-maid, God's gifts are freely given!

WHEN I AM DUST

When I am dust, the stars and the grey sea
Shall go on shining and singing—but not for me.

When I am gone, the gospel of the grass
Shall still be uttered—but not for me, alas!

And when my feet on their last journey turn,
Still in the heavens the sunset fires shall burn;

Still in the woods the nightingales shall sing
As once for me on a white day of Spring.

And folk shall move, and smile, and speak, and
nod;
But I shall be away—at home with God.

OF ONE SELF-SLAIN

When he went blundering back to God,
  His songs half written, his work half done,
Who knows what paths his bruised feet trod,
  What hills of peace or pain he won?

I hope God smiled, and took his hand,
  And said, "Poor truant, passionate fool!
Life's book is hard to understand:
  Why couldst thou not remain at school?"

THE OLD LOVELINESS

No beauty lasts; no dream stays on;
Earth wheels from ghostly dawn to dawn.
And soon, ah! soon, the red moon pales,
And even golden Sirius fails.

O whither, like a phantom goes
The royal crimson of the rose?
Behind what rampart of the night
Retreats the sun's imperial light?

We do not know; we only guess:
Yet loveliness crowds loveliness,
And every starlit evening seems
More wonderful than vanished dreams.

IN SUMMER

THE days drift by—as ships drift out to sea:
Morning, high noon, twilight's tranquillity.

And then—the peace the honeyed evening brings
With the large moon and old rememberings.

Old memories, old raptures, old desires,
Old joys return, and Youth's immortal fires;

Old loves that still around the spirit lie
And whisper of long Summer days gone by.

O rapture of the world that crowds to-night
About my soul, and brings back lost delight,

Bid me farewell when the last stars awake,
Or else my wounded heart will break, will break!

THE BEST ROAD OF ALL

I LIKE a road that leads away to prospects white and fair,
A road that is an ordered road, like a nun's evening prayer;
But, best of all, I love a road that leads to God knows where.

You come upon it suddenly—you cannot seek it out;
It's like a secret still unheard and never noised about;
But when you see it, gone at once is every lurking doubt.

It winds beside some rushing stream where aspens lightly quiver;
It follows many a broken field by many a shining river;
It seems to lead you on and on, forever and forever!

You tramp along its dusty way, beneath its shadowy trees,
And hear beside you chattering birds or happy booming bees,
And all around you golden sounds, the green leaves' litanies.

And here's a hedge, and there's a cot; and then—
strange, sudden turns;
A dip, a rise, a little glimpse where the red sunset
burns;
A bit of sky at eveningtime, the scent of hidden
ferns.

A winding road, a loitering road, a finger-mark of
God
Traced when the Maker of the world leaned over
ways untrod.
See! Here He smiled His glowing smile, and lo,
the goldenrod!

I like a road that wanders straight; the King's
highway is fair,
And lovely are the sheltered lanes that take you
here and there;
But, best of all, I love a road that leads to God
knows where.

THE SHADOW

I saw your shadow on the lawn
Before the crimson sun had gone—
A phantom, a dark ghost of you
That changed and more mysterious grew
As the light faded from the world
And daylight into darkness whirled.

I loved that curious grotesque,
That strange and shapeless arabesque;
That dim suggestion of your hair,
That monstrous drawing of you there;
That whimsical design which seemed
Like something that a madman dreamed.

For it was you—and yet not you;
True in intention—yet untrue;
As if, in sleep, a demon came
And backward wrote your lovely name.
It was like music out of key—
Yet O, how wonderful to me!

A LOVE SONG

"We perish like the Summer moth;
We vanish like the rainbow's hue."
Thus mumble deep philosophers:
And yet I go on loving you!

"We fade like sunsets; go like rain.
Man's moment is a fleeting thing."
Hark to the sages of the world!—
Yet round my throat your arms still cling.

"Life is a bubble in a glass;
Love is a madness. Both shall be
Consumed like snow beneath the sun" . . .
And yet you go on loving me!

ONE KISS

THROUGH the dim years we may recall
Tristan and Iseult's kiss;
And that first moment—best of all—
Of Abelard's wild bliss.

And Helen's holy moment when
To one her lips she turned;
Long, long within the breasts of men
Its golden fire has burned.

Kisses of love, when love first came—
They shall outlast the grave.
But oh, that deathless kiss of shame—
The kiss that Judas gave!

OLD HOUSES

I LOVE old houses, with vines running over,
Set in a riot of roses and clover,
Set in a wonder of old, old trees,
Dreaming of far, dim memories.

I love their windows, like old eyes
That seem to look into paradise.
If the old, old houses could speak to us
Out of their glory ruinous!

If ghosts could pass through dusty halls
Where Love held holy carnivals,
And the ancient words could be said once more,
When a young bride passed through the friendly door!

If the dead could return, return and speak,
And kiss again one rose-red cheek!
And yet, 'tis better we do not know
The sad, mad stories of long ago.

Let the old, old houses their secrets keep;
Leave them alone in their quiet sleep.
They are like old folk who nod by the fire,
Glad with their dreams of youth and desire.

HOW WILL IT SEEM?

How will it seem when Peace comes back once more,
After these desperate days of shattering pain?
How will it be with all of us again,
When hushed forever is the thunder of War?
There still are primroses by many a shore;
And still there bloom, in many a lovely lane,
Hawthorn and lilacs; and the roses' stain
Is red against full many a garden door.

O days to be! O honeyed nights of sleep,
When the white moon shall mount the quiet sky!
Shall we be wholly happy when buds creep,
Remembering those who dared to bleed and die?
Can we be glad again? Nay, we shall weep
For those who told this sad, glad world good-bye.

ON SOME RECENT ALLIED VICTORIES

Be humble, O my country! In this hour,
Remember there are fiery paths to cross,
Undreamed-of anguish and unreckoned loss
To face with courage, ere the perfect flower
Of Peace shall blossom after hell's red shower.
Be confident; be brave; yet also be
Like the great Christ in His humility;
Be mindful of the purpose of your power.

It is not gain you seek. It is not praise.
Therefore let pride be buried in the dust.
Fight on, foregetful of this flaming dower
Of sudden victory. There shall be days
Of darkness when your bright steel seems like
rust. . . .
Be humble, O my country, in this hour!

ITALIA IN EXCELSIS
(1917)

Now she has risen from her dreams of ease,
  Mighty at last, her soul recharged with fire.
  She leaves her olive-groves, and high and higher
Climbs toward blue heaven upon her very knees.
O let her roses perish! What of these
  In this wild hour, if in her heart expire
  The prayer that led her to this white desire
For peace that shall outlive the centuries?

Go higher still, brave host! Mount up to God
  Until you storm the ramparts of the sky!
Our souls are climbing with you. Iron shod
  Shall be your feet; the peaks of dawn defy.
Then from those crests and crags of blinding snow
Pour down your thunder on the world below!

TO A STRICKEN WORLD

Be not disheartened, weary world, since War
With iron teeth gnaws at the gates of Life.
This pain shall pass; this horror and this strife
Shall vanish. All this grief that we deplore
Shall fade, and the white gods we waited for,
Out of the mist may come with healing hands.
There is so much that no one understands:
The earth in darkness, heaven's bolted door.

But what of all the sins that never cease?—
Our sleek content with inequality,
Our placid ease through years of so-called peace,
When the pale poor weep everlastingly;
Our dumb acceptance of red wrongs that be—
O what of these, blind world—yea, what of these?

A PRAYER FOR THE OLD COURAGE

STILL let us go the way of beauty; go
The way of loveliness; still let us know
Those paths that lead where Pan and Daphne run,
Where roses prosper in the Summer sun.

The earth may rock with War. Still is there peace
In many a place to give the heart release
From this too-vibrant pain that drives men mad.
Let us go back to the old love we had.

Let us go back, to keep alive the gleam,
To cherish the immortal, God-like dream;
Not as poor cravens flying from the fight,
But as sad children seeking the clean light.

O doubly precious now is solitude;
Thrice dear yon quiet star above the wood,
Since panic and the sundering shock of War
Have laid in ruins all we hungered for.

Brave soldiers of the spirit, guard ye well
Mountain and fort and massive citadel;
But keep ye white forever—keep ye whole
The battlements of dream within the soul!

RUINS

[*For Christian Brinton*]

THEY sat at supper in a shadowy room.
"But you," she said, "*you* are an artist! You
Deplore this tearing down of all our dreams!
You know that War is shattering the world,
And Beauty falls in ashes at our feet."

He looked at her, full-blown and glorious
With flaming eyes and tossed, abundant hair.

"How I abhor this hour!" he softly said.
"I never thought the world could come to this.
Yet always through the years, the flame of War,
Like a long crimson serpent has crept and crept,
And poisoned all the beauty that we built.
The Parthenon was stricken by the blast
Of cruel cannon in disastrous days;
Yet in the moonlight it is wonderful
In a strange way the mind can never name.
And strong barbarian hordes tore down that dream,
The Coliseum; and manly Romans wept.
Yet it is lovelier on soft Summer nights
Than ever it must have been in the young years.

And Rheims—it shall be doubly beautiful
With a new meaning through the centuries,
Hushed with its memories of this dark hour."

Her face grew grave. "You dare to tell me this!—
You say a ruin is more wonderful
Than the pure dream the architect once dreamed?"

"I cannot answer. But one thing I know:
Men rush across the seas to catch one glimpse
Of fallen fanes and tottering columns. Yes,
They fare through desolate places that their eyes
May rest at last on crumbling marble. . . . See!
Those men and women rise—and we must rise
To pay our tribute to that noble man
Who has come back, a ruin from the War."

She turned. There was a soldier at the door;
And one sleeve of his uniform hung limp,
And there were many scars upon his cheeks.

"A ruin!" the artist whispered. "Yet he seems
The only whole and perfect man I know!"

AFTERWARDS

The sick man said: "I pray I shall not die
Before this tumult which now rocks the earth
Shall cease. I dread far journeyings to God
Ere I have heard the final shots of War,
And learned the outcome of this holocaust."

Yet one night, while the guns still roared and
flashed,
His spirit left his body; left the earth
Which he had loved in sad, disastrous days,
And sped to heav'n amid the glittering stars
And the white splendour of the quiet moon.

One instant—and a hundred years rushed by!
And he, a new immortal, found his way
Among the high celestial hills of God.
Then suddenly one memory of earth
Flashed like a meteor's flame across his mind.

One instant—and another hundred years!
And even the dream of that poor little place
Which he had known, was lost in greater spheres
Through which he whirled; and old remembrances

Were but as flecks of dust blown down the night;
And nothing mattered, save that suns and moons
Swung in the ether for unnumbered worlds
High, high above the pebble of the earth.

TO WALTER HAMPDEN AS "HAMLET"

The Prince of Denmark lives for us once more,
Since you have opened the immortal door,
Emerged, and walked within our eager view,
Young, mad, and weary; yea, but human too.

You caught hid meanings of the mighty Bard;
And through those lines with aching beauty
starred,
You wove a thread of sound, like winds at dawn—
Your voice the thread, each word a bead thereon.

So Shakespeare's magic lives for us again;
So we are conscious of the breathing Dane,
And, while we marvel, and the young Prince dies,
Another glory shines within the skies.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

I

On what divine adventure has he gone?
Beyond what peaks of dawn
Is he now faring? On what errand blest
Has his impulsive heart now turned? No rest
Could be the portion of his tireless soul.
He seeks some frenzied goal
Where he can labour on till Time is not,
And earth is nothing but a thing forgot.

II

Pilot and Prophet! as the years increase
The sorrow of your passing will not cease.
We love to think of you still moving on
From sun to blazing sun,
From planet to far planet, to some height
Of clean perfection in the Infinite,
Where with the wise Immortals you can find
The Peace you fought for with your heart and mind.
Yet from that bourne where you are journeying
Sometimes we think we hear you whispering,
"I went away, O world so false and true,
I went away—with still so much to do!"

CITY FLASHES

THE BUS CONDUCTOR

We're happy in the omnibus—
A jolly little crowd of us.
We're going to dine—we four—up-town.
It will be late when we come down.
The seats begin to fill, and though
It is a night of soft, slow snow,
Some youngsters clamour up the stair,
And sit on top to drink the air.

The bus conductor comes, in time,
And holds his hand out for our dime.
He calls the streets, and rings the bell,
And does his various duties well.
The Avenue, aflame with stars,
Is crowded with swift motor-cars;
And at a corner now and then
We stop, and rush along again.

The bus conductor looks at us;
His eyes are young and mischievous,
Yet there's a lurking sadness too
Within those depths of Irish blue.
He seems to say, "Your young, wild feet,
Can dance off here at any street!

Yes, you can leave—and dine and sup;
While I must ring some new fares up.

"I'm like an engine on a track;
I first go down, and then come back.
I'm part of this old omnibus,
And Jove! it gets monotonous!"

Ah! here's our street! . . . We dined till ten,
And danced till midnight. Home again,
Within the cosy bus; and there
The same conductor took our fare!

THE BLIND

THE blind man fumbled down the street,
(How far, for him, the street must wind!)
I heard the click of his wretched stick,
His thin, "Please help the blind!"

I hurried past him, till his voice
Was lost, like gulls' cries far at sea.
I had two eyes, but saw him not:
If he was blind, oh, what of me!

TELEPHONES

THINK of the bells that are ringing
All over the great city!
Think of the words that are singing—
Words of love, and pity.

Yet there is one number only
That I want more than all.
Strange that I, who am lonely,
Dare not enter the call!

THE PEOPLE IN THE PARK

These are the city's poets,
These people in the park,
Who sit and watch slow shadows
Melt into the dark;

Who come on Maytime evenings,
Or on rich nights of June,
And see above the treetops
The bubble of the moon;

Who listen to the fountain
That tinkles all day long,
And let its echo lodge with them,
An anthem and a song.

Young lovers loiter gladly
In many a leafy place,
And look with the old wonder
Into each other's face.

These are the happy poets
Whom nothing can dismay,
Who keep wise dreams within their hearts
That none can take away.

SUNDAY EVENING

I SAW a pale young clerk coming home from the country,
His tired wife beside him, his child on his knee;
In his hands a bunch of crushed lilacs and wilting dogwood—
But in his heart a joy unknown to me.

The Subway clamoured and clattered; the lurching people,
Weary, after long tramps through a scented lane,
Seemed like phantoms before me and all around me,
Their faces like ghosts in gardens after light rain.

But O, they were real! They were only too human!
Their eyes held the eager fire of dreams and of youth.
And I, in my loneliness, I to them was a phantom;
They had been out in still places; they had tasted the Truth.

And now they had memories for a week of days
unending;
Now they had glamour enough to carry them
through.
And only I was alone in that heaving Subway—
I, an idle dreamer, with nothing at all to do.

ON SEEING A NUN IN A TAXICAB

Little sister, did you know,
When I saw you through the glass of the cab,
That your life held as great contrasts
As the lives of deposed kings and czars?
One moment, a lonely cell;
Then this sudden projection into flaming Fifth Avenue!
How strange the streets must have seemed to you,
Little white sister, sitting there so still!

I was in a 'bus,
And at Forty-second street the traffic halted us,
Side by side, and I could almost have touched you.
I peered into your privacy,
Like the fool that I was,
And I felt ashamed of myself
When I saw in your hands a rosary;
Your lips were moving,
And I turned away.

When you reached your destination,
I still wonder, unworldly little sister,
If you realised that even you
Were expected to tip the chauffeur!

SUNDAY IN AN OFFICE BUILDING

The corridors are strangely still;
The offices are bleak and chill.
The elevators do not run
On busy errands. Life seems done,
And no one guards the marble door
Wherethrough, on Monday, there will pour
Hundreds—nay, thousands—like a tide;
Legions that cannot be denied.

The desks are empty; mice confer
Like ghouls within a sepulchre.
This is the temporary grave
Of volumes over which men slave.
To-morrow it will be alive
With rushing feet, a sounding hive.
Yet for these few brief hours it knows
The stillness of the dreaming rose.

AROUND THE CORNER

AROUND the corner I have a friend,
In this great city that has no end;
Yet days go by, and weeks rush on,
And before I know it a year is gone,
And I never see my old friend's face,
For Life is a swift and terrible race.
He knows I like him just as well
As in the days when I rang his bell
And he rang mine. We were younger then,
And now we are busy, tired men:
Tired with playing a foolish game,
Tired with trying to make a name.
"To-morrow," I say, "I will call on Jim,
Just to show that I'm thinking of him."
But to-morrow comes—and to-morrow goes,
And the distance between us grows and grows.

Around the corner!—yet miles away. . . .
"Here's a telegram, sir. . . ."
"Jim died to-day."
And that's what we get, and deserve in the end:
Around the corner, a vanished friend.

THE USHER

HERE in this hall,
Where I have shown people to their respective places
For many and many a year,
I have heard innumerable lectures,
I have heard hundreds of singers.
Like a long procession,
Like an endless lantern-slide
They have marched and glided before me—
Poets from England and France,
Publicists from all over the world,
Pianists from Poland and Germany and Sweden,
Baritones, sopranos and contraltos from God knows where;
String quartettes and individual harpists,
Dancers and elocutionists,
Each having his little hour of triumph and rapture,
Or his terrible moment of failure and dismay.

I have seen the hall crowded,
And alas! I have seen it almost empty—
Forlorn stretches of cane-bottomed chairs.

Once, when a returned soldier spoke here,
The people couldn't get in;
And once, when a girl from North Dakota,
Frightened almost to death on her first appearance,
Fainted on the platform,
And had to be carried out,
I suffered with her when she ignominiously broke down.
One thing comforted me:
There were only forty-two people present.

Sometimes when it rains
It is pitiful to see what small crowds turn out.
And often it is the best attractions which fail.
Dull missionaries seem to be able to pack the house.
I suppose they give tickets away to their relatives,
Or to poor Sunday-school children
And their poorer parents from the East Side.
I know very well that there is no money taken in at the box-office
On such bleak occasions.
Students, however, pay to hear great artists,
And there are foreign poets who reap a harvest
Because of their clever managers.
I listen to them all,
For they strangely interest me.
What a lot of wasted energy there is in the world!

What a lot of buncombe and silly vanity!
Any one with a hundred dollars can hire this hall
And give a concert or a reading—
Think of it!
But I don't mind that, since I earn my living here.

Oh, this never-ceasing procession of "talent"!—
An army of mediocrity
That ought to be out fighting and really working
somewhere.
Only once in an age does a genius come along.
It is pitiful.
And it is strange that after three years and a half,
When so many others have come and gone,
I find myself thinking about that little singer from
North Dakota
Who broke down and fainted.
I have completely forgotten her name,
But her face forever haunts me. . . .
I wonder what became of her?

THE MESSENGER BOY

When he goes whistling down the street—
His eyes are young and young his feet—
He does not know the words that stand
Like rows of flame within his hand.
He casually rings the bell
Of 42, where all is well,
And waits there in the vestibule,
Where it is hushed and clean and cool;
A careless lad who does not guess
The words he brings bring emptiness,
Bring sorrow and engulfing tears,
And change the smooth march of the years.
The door is opened. Nevermore
Will one pass through that friendly door.
White fingers tear the envelope,
White fingers through the message grope.
There is a cry, a sound of feet. . . .
A boy goes whistling down the street.

IN A DEPARTMENT STORE

(The building that formerly housed a certain great shop in New York has been turned into a hospital for wounded soldiers.)

I

Women used to stroll through these aisles,
Idly looking at laces,
Studying the new styles,
And the new graces. . . .
Now, if they walked these dim defiles,
They would see only faces:

II

Faces of boys who have been
Through the mud and the mire,
But who laugh, and chuckle, and grin
In their bandaged attire;
Smile, since deep down within,
Their souls are on fire.

III

Where the counters stood yesterday,
Covered with light stuff,

And you thought the shop gay
With its delicate bright stuff,
See what a long array
Of the spiritual right stuff!

IV

This was once but a mart;
Here salesgirl and shoe-man
Played a diplomat's part
For each difficult woman;
Now the place finds its heart—
It is suddenly human!

V

These lads have come back—
Oh, the long, aching aisles of them!
They are laid on pain's rack—
I think there are miles of them!
But watch their lips crack
At your jokes! See the smiles of them!

VI

And there's singing here now,
And the movie's bright flash;
Life is strange, I avow;
Gone are cretonne and crash.
See that lad's tied-up brow
In the aisle that heard "Cash!"

VII

Here are rest and quiet
Where they never had been;
No "bargain day" riot,
No bustle and din.
This stuff—you can't buy it!—
God laid the stock in!

WAR-TIME PORTRAITS

STEPHEN

He was a quiet little man,
The simplest soul I ever knew;
He did his best, and no one can
Find any better thing to do.
He took me up and down each day—
In our old house he ran the lift;
I'd miss him if he went away
Even for one short hour's shift.

His face was young for one so old,
For he was well past thirty-nine;
Yet lightly the swift years had rolled,
And never left a single sign.
And so we named him Peter Pan—
The boy eternal in him dwelt;
How well that ancient car he ran!—
The job was his for life, we felt.

He loved to read; and every night
I would discuss the news with him.
I gave him books, both grave and bright—
Dickens, and Riley, and "Lord Jim."

But when that frightful August came,
And the base Hun revealed his power,
Stephen gave up the fiction game,
And read the papers by the hour.

He used to say, in those first days
When Europe rocked with awful war,
His brain, like mine, in a thick haze,
"I wonder what they're fighting for!"
I tried to tell him of a land
Gone mad with love of greed and lust.
He did not seem to understand,
And said he thought I was unjust.

Then came the time when we joined, too,
The mighty conflict Over There;
You heard men say, "What can I do?"
And, "Lord! I want to do my share!"
I held a paper in my hand
That morning when I went down-town.
Steve looked at it. "I understand
At last," he said; and took me down.

He didn't talk much after that;
The thing was getting him, I knew;
Sometimes he failed to touch his hat,—
Not that I'd ever asked him to.
Oh, no! For Stephen was our friend;
He'd run that car for twenty years,

And knew the house from end to end, —
  Its laughter, and its pain and tears.

The weeks rolled by. Conscription came;
  They called the fine lads out to die.
"By Jove!" said Stephen. "It's a shame!" . . .
  "Well, what else could we do?" said I.
"You don't quite understand me, sir.
  I was just thinking. . . ." Nothing more;
The elevator gave a stir,
  And very soon I reached my floor.

It was in June that Stephen left;
  I missed our faithful Peter Pan.
The house seemed curiously bereft
  Without the quiet little man.
He never had been sick a day,
  And so we asked about him. Then
We learned that he had gone away
  To try to join the fighting men!

It seems that when they called the draft
  Stephen was in the foremost line.
"How old are you?" the General laughed.
  "Why, sir, I'm—let's see—twenty-nine!"
"The deuce you are!" the General said.
  "You'll never see twice that again!
You're growing grey. We want instead
  A million of the younger men."

The younger men! Yes, Peter Pan,
To whom the years had been so kind,
Was not a boy now, but a man;
And we who loved him had been blind.
For Love is blind indeed. And yet
I'm glad it is; for who would see
The grief this war has grimly set
On faces dear to you and me?

Rejected! Peter Pan too old
To join the ranks and fight the fight!
His hair had lost its brilliant gold,
His eyes their sparkle, in a night.
Rejected! Yes, they wanted boys,
They wanted only youth for this!
Mars wanted only radiant toys
To toss in Hell's metropolis!

Back to our quiet house he came,
The young-old Stephen. I could see
The vanished youth, the vanished flame,
And the new awful tragedy.
Yet is he not a soldier, lit
With fire? Is not his cage a trench
Wherein his spirit does its bit
For us, for England, and the French?

THE YOUNG AMBULANCE-DRIVER

I

Long, long before America entered the War,
My young frend went to France
To do his bit for Democracy.
He drove an ambulance through blood and mud,
Through rain and sleet, through darkness and
through starlight;
And then he came back home to gather funds
For many a needed motor-car Out There.

I heard him tell the story of his work
With no pride in his voice, but only tears—
The suppressed tears of a man who has seen
suffering,
And knows at last Life's deeper currents;
A man who has encountered Reality,
And almost dreads to tell of it.

I shall never forget his words;
I shall never forget the hidden sob in his voice—
There are some things the years cannot blot out.

II

A few nights later I met him at the house of an acquaintance.
A sparkling dinner it was, with red wine flowing,
And trivial laughter and more trivial talk.
Light women fawned on my friend,
For they heard he had been to France
And had been made a Major.
They asked him silly questions of the conflict;
Then, scarcely waiting for his patient answers,
They turned away, or hurried into the next room
To play bridge or poker with steel magnates and professional diners-out.

III

I watched the young Major's face,
When, to oblige his hostess,
He was good enough to make a fourth at a certain bridge table.
How less than nothing the cards seemed to him!
How less than nothing this unfeeling group of people!
I knew by his eyes—his tragic eyes—
That he was thinking of wounded men in Flanders,
And cries of pain in the night in rain-drenched Ypres;
Or perhaps of that poor, brave fellow he had told us about—

The one who had lost his arms, but smiled and said,
"I offered my life to France, but she took only my arms!"

Finally he got up and went quietly away.
A young girl muttered, "What a curious fellow that young Major is!
And he played that rubber so badly!"

IV

The next morning I heard that he was going back—
Going back from hollow joy to actual sorrow.

I wonder if I can go with him?

JACK LE MAR

"THERE's a job to do—and we've got to do it!"
That's what he said. And he went right to it.

He followed the dirty work clean through.
"What else," he said, "can a fellow do?"

It isn't a lark to go to a camp
Where the food is poor and the cots are damp;

To drill in the sun through the Summer days
Till your legs are sore and your brain's in a haze.

"War isn't the fun that you hear it is;
It's as hard as nails when the bullets whiz.

"It's filthy and cold in a narrow trench;
But you've got to help the English and French.

"You've got to get down to the facts as they are;
There's a mess in the world," says Jack Le Mar.

"Let's clean it up, and then come back
To the good, smooth days on a level track.

"But now—there's a job, and we've got to do it!"
That's what he said. And he went right to it.

JIM SMITH

JIM SMITH was never troubled by the war.
He rather smiled at it, and simply said,
"Well, some day everybody will be dead,
And so why worry? What they scrappin' for?

"It doesn't matter much who wins this row;
They're all insane. . . . The *Lusitania?* Gee!
If *I* was warned, I'd never go to sea.
Belgium? Oh, what's the difference anyhow!"

And so he rambled on. A neutral? Yes;
Part pacifist, and part Pro-German too—
Though to admit the latter would not do;
He realised *that* much, at least, I guess.

No issues bothered *him!* He smoked and drank,
Went to the races, never gave a cent
For Red Cross work—but took his nourishment;
What matter if another steamer sank?

"I'm sick of readin' of this rotten War!
What's at the Strand this week? Come on, let's go.
A war film? Say, that ain't my kind of show.
Nothin' but guns! . . . No wonder I get sore.

"Well, let's go down to Lüchow's. I'm all in. . . .
No Pilsener? What the devil do you mean?
No Münchener? Listen! Can you beat that,
Gene?
I *told* you this war'd hit us! . . . Make it gin!"

YOUNG RUPERT

His hair was golden as a girl's; his cheeks were pink and white;
His hands were delicate and soft; he hated men who fight.
He never argued, never raised his gentle voice a bit;
If anything, he was *too* fine; he was *too* exquisite.
But when they needed youngsters, those early days in France,
Young Rupert packed his grip and went to drive an ambulance.

He had a soft, bland way with him; he passed the drinks and smokes;
He hated ribald stories, he detested filthy jokes.
He loved the lovely things of life; he played—ah! what a touch!
Some said he was effeminate; men didn't like him much.
But when the Allies needed help, young Rupert seized his chance;
He didn't balk; he didn't talk; he simply sailed for France.

His light companions loitered here—the chaps
who laughed at him
Because he was too "precious"; and because his
waist was slim.
They're guzzling beer in dim cafés, they're smok-
ing strong cigars,
They're telling us what *they* would do with kaisers,
kings, and czars.
But Rupert's on the firing-line; he's helping all
he can.
Effeminate? Not on your life! He's every
inch a man!

A CERTAIN ENGLISH ACTOR

His face was like a cameo; his hair
Was golden as the sun. He went away
To fight for England on a winter's day;
We said good-bye upon our lodging stair.
He'd read the bulletins in Herald Square,
Till they got on his nerves. His face grew grey.
"The bulldog needs me!" he would grimly say.
And ten days later he was Over There.

I never heard from him. There came no news
Through all that fighting host—until last week. . . .
He has a crippled arm, a shattered cheek—
How quickly he responded to his cues!
Can he come back to trifling dramas now,
When Death has almost kissed him on the brow?

WILLIE LAMB

He danced through life, through many a cabaret;
At Babylonian feasts he graced the floor,
While the loud orchestra its tones would pour
Like crimson wine, until the break of day.
His face was young, and weak. We used to say,
"Here is one made for laughter—nothing more.
A lad whose pagan beauty we deplore—
An Ariel, or perhaps a Dorian Gray."

Yet high above the music of the dance,
Young Lamb had heard the bugles Over There,
And while we sat and dreamed, in a strange trance,
He left the shallow Broadway glitter and glare,
And gave his boyish heart to stricken France.
Ah! call him light and foolish—if you dare!

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